R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 015 397 AC 001 779

SOME REFLECTIONS ON DEFINING ADULT EDUCATION.

BY- LONDON, JACK WENKERT, ROBERT
CALIFORNIA UNIV., BERKELEY, SURVEY RESEARCH CTR.

PUB DATE MAR 63

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$1.32 31P.

DESCRIPTORS- *ADULT EDUCATION, *ADULT CHARACTERISTICS, *CRITERIA, *EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY, *EDUCATIONAL TRENDS, EDUCATIONAL METHODS, EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES, ENROLLMENT RATE, HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH NEEDS, UNITED STATES,

ADULT EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES INCLUDES ALL EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES, AS DETERMINED BY THE PURPOSES OF THE SPONSORS, WHICH TAKE PLACE IN AN ORGANIZED CONTEXT. VARIETY, FLEXIBILITY, DECENTRALIZATION, AND SENSITIVITY TO THE NEEDS OF THE LARGER SOCIETY ARE AMONG ITS MOST IMPORTANT FEATURES. THE CRITERIA OF ADULTHOOD ITSELF--MARRIAGE, SELF-SUPPORT, AND TERMINATION OF FORMAL EDUCATION--ARE BEING MODIFIED BY EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC TRENDS IN SUCH AREAS AS PROFESSIONAL CONTINUING EDUCATION, JUNIOR COLLEGE-SPONSORED SKILL TRAINING, AND ADULT DEGREE PROGRAMS. VOCATIONAL RETRAINING, REMEDIAL EDUCATION, VOCATIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL EDUCATION, LIBERAL CONTINUING EDUCATION. INSTRUCTION FOR SPECIAL INTERESTS, AND THE DUPLICATION OF INSTRUCTION PROVIDED BY THE FORMAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS CONTINUE TO BE MAJOR FUNCTIONS OF ADULT EDUCATION, BUT VOCATIONAL AND LIBERAL EDUCATION MAY TEND TO MERGE AS THE GENERAL LEVEL OF EDUCATION RISES. (THE DOCUMENT INCLUDES IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PLANNING, AND ENROLLMENT DATA FOR ADULT AND HIGHER EDUCATION.) (LY)

ED015397

SURVEY RESEARCH CENTER
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
BERKELEY 4, CALIFORNIA

SOME REFLECTIONS ON DEFINING ADULT EDUCATION

by

Jack London and Robert Wenkert

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

SRC Monograph No. M8

SOME REFLECTIONS ON DEFINING ADULT EDUCATION

by

Jack London and Robert Wenkert

Survey Research Center
University of California
Berkeley 4, California

March 1963

LC
5215
L56
c.1

Some Reflections On Defining Adult Education[1]

Introduction

Adult educators have been attempting for years to delineate what adult education is and how it differs from other educational ventures. Many definitions have been formulated, but we have found few of them to be sufficiently precise so that they could be used to form a clearcut research instrument. The difficulty is two-fold: (1) there is a great tendency to define adult education by what one feels it should be, rather than by what it actually is, and (2) adult education is so amorphous and diverse that it is difficult to define it precisely. The latter difficulty is illustrated if we examine adult education's clientele, subject matter, methods, techniques, length of programming, and especially the types of organizations active in the field.

Potentially the clientele of adult education is the entire adult population. This is a most diverse collection of people, especially in the United States which harbors so many ethnic and nationality strains. In contrast, other levels of education can be more easily defined by a scheme of age grading.

The subject matter of adult education is also exceedingly diverse, encompassing such subjects as literacy training, professional and technical education, religion, personal development, speed reading, sewing and woodworking, and the more liberal subjects such as literature, music, and the arts. Almost everything is included, from the profane to the sublime.

---

[1]This essay was written during the course of a survey of adult education participation in Oakland, California. The study was supported by a grant from the U. S. Office of Education, and the authors are in the process of analyzing the obtained data.

UC 12 dec 63 9 (2 copies)

Adult education methods, in turn, also evidence diversity. There is correspondence study, apprenticeship, on-the-job-training, internship in classes, discussion groups, conferences, lecture series, and more complex forms such as community development. The techniques used include lectures, panels, forums, demonstrations, projects, discussions, mechanical devices such as teaching machines, and workshops. And the activity itself may extend only over a few days, as is the case with some workshops and conferences, or may continue over an extended period of time with changing program activities and a diversity of participants.

Perhaps the greatest source of ambiguity is to be attributed to the diversity of organizations sponsoring adult education activities. In addition to formally defined educational institutions, there are museums, libraries, industrial organizations, labor unions, professional societies, military establishments, hospitals, religious organizations, trade associations, state and local governments, prisons, and a host of political, charitable, social, civic, ethnic, and other community organizations. While some of these consider adult education to be a central function of the establishment, the overwhelming majority utilize adult education as a means of achieving or advancing other goals. Indeed, a unique characteristic of adult education is that the majority of sponsored programs are organized by non-educational groups.

In substance, then, adult education activity includes the most varied kinds of organizational structures, purposes, methods, techniques, and participants. Because of this medley of activities the task of defining adult education is a most difficult one.

Historical and Comparative Reflections

The historical roots of adult education provide us with a dimension of meaning so that the present situation can be placed in somewhat clearer context.

The earliest motive for adult education was concerned with man's salvation, and adult education was thus limited to the religious sphere. However, secular efforts to promote education for adults can be found in the sixteenth century in Great Britain, as a reaction against the rigidity of schools and universities which failed to take account of new discoveries in their curricula and therefore failed to meet the emerging needs of the population.[2]

Whether the idea of adult education first arose among the ancient Greeks or in the Renaissance is a moot point which will continue to be debated by historians. Our interest is to consider factors which contributed to the development of adult education in the modern world, and it appears clear that in this context adult education arose out of the issues and problems of daily living. It represented a revolt against a static society, in which everyone was expected to know his place and to stay in it, and was stimulated by the industrial revolution which ushered in such great changes in society. During this time the authority of tradition was the dominant motif of formal education, which was limited to a small elite segment of the population. In contrast, adult education arose to expand the educational opportunities of the mass of people who were called upon to assume new roles in the emerging industrial societies of the west.

Still later, in the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth century, an important motive for adult education was to extend and strengthen democracy by expanding opportunities for education among adults, particularly in countries such as Great Britain and Denmark, and also partly in the United States. During this period there occurred the development of folk schools in Denmark, extra-mural programs and WEA in Great Britain, and such institutions in the United States as the Lyceum, Chautauqua, Lowell Institute in Boston, Cooper Union in

---

[2]Thomas Kelly, A History of Adult Education in Great Britain (Liverpool, England: Liverpool University Press, 1962), p. 23.

New York City, public libraries and museums, and numerous voluntary associations. These were established in part to transmit knowledge and democratic attitudes and values to the mass of people who had little prior opportunity for education.

While motives for promoting the education of adults were mixed, the important ones were the desire to achieve salvation, to transmit the knowledge and skills needed to assume new occupational roles emerging out of the industrial revolution, to promote social action, and to strengthen and extend the forces of democracy. In Britain and Denmark, the primary goal of adult education was the development of the individual as a human being, to assist him in becoming a more effective participant in society. The focus was non-vocational, and even today the concept of adult education in Great Britain is limited to liberal education undertaken by adults for personal and social development without regard to any direct vocational value. Education of a vocational, technical, or professional character is subsumed under the title of "further education."

In contrast, the American idea of adult education includes all forms of education for adults, such as vocational, remedial, recreational, liberal, technical, professional, religious, and family life education. Even the early American institutions that arose to promote adult education, or which utilized it in achieving other goals, tended to combine liberal, vocational, and recreational types of educational activities in their programs. While the impact of the industrial revolution increased the importance of vocational training, Great Britain chose to limit its adult education to non-vocational activities, while Americans combined all forms of education for adults under the same rubric.

If we examine adult education in America today, we are still faced with this eclectic and all-encompassing approach. Adult education covers virtually all areas of human existence where more knowledge and skill are needed to assume the adult social roles in the complexity of today's social world. The rise of the

nuclear family has promoted the growth of home and family life education.[3] The increasing interest in do-it-yourself activities, which can be partly traced to increased leisure and affluence, has stimulated an increase in programs relating to hobbies and recreational pursuits. The increasing importance of academic requirements for job promotion has led to the demand for programs giving certificates, degrees, and diplomas. Other areas of growth have been in religion, illustrated, for example, by the recent development of the Laymen's School of Religion in Berkeley, California; in personal development, which includes leadership training, physical fitness, and skills such as speed reading; and in public affairs and politics, whose appeal is reflected in world politics programs, Politics 1960, the U. S. Chamber of Commerce program of practical political action, and courses on Communism. While leisure, family, and work interests continue to dominate adult education programming, there also appears to be an increasing interest in liberal education for adults and a blossoming of programs of a liberalizing character across the country.[4] Part of this movement may be a reaction against the growth of mass society, the increasing importance of technology, and a decreasing satisfaction from work, but this movement is also partly traceable to the fact that America is becoming an urban and educated nation to whom the importance of a liberal education is presumably more apparent.

These few comments have been offered to provide some introduction to the task of defining adult education. In the attempt at definition we have tried to be true to adult education as we find it, so that our conclusions will be meaningful to professional adult educators as well as to lay leaders and the public.

---

[3] Orville G. Brim, Jr., Education for Child Rearing (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1959).

[4] A. A. Liveright, National Trends in Higher Adult Education; Occasional Papers, No. 2 (Chicago: Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults, 1960).

Defining Adult Education

The impetus to define adult education in a clear and explicit manner arose out of our concern for a definition that would meet the test of research requirements. No matter how amorphous a phenomenon may be, a researcher must formulate a workable definition that will serve to translate observable situations or events if research is to be carried out.

In some areas of research, this process of definition is relatively easy. An example is voting behavior, in which the process is helped by the fact that voting is a widely recognized and explicitly defined act anchored to specific times and places, having a relatively short duration, being regulated by sets of rules, and having an outcome which is easily measured and for which an elaborate machinery of measurement already exists.

As noted previously, adult education does not lend itself to easy definition and measurement. Apart from the complex and amorphous character of adult education, there has been little research undertaken compared to other fields, and the criteria of rigorous definition required by research have seldom operated in the formulation of the many definitions found in the literature.

By reading, reflection, and our experience with educational activity, we have tried to extract the meaning of adult education as it is practiced in the United States. In this attempt we wished to do justice to the variety of activities actually found in the field, to take into consideration the many views regarding adult education existing among its practitioners, and finally to arrive at a clear and precise enough definition to be useful in the construction of a research instrument such as a questionnaire. In short, we wished to arrive at the essential character of adult education, and thereby to distinguish it from other types of social activity. In making such distinctions, we were

required to answer two important questions: (1) what is the character of education? (2) what is the nature of adulthood?

Education as Purpose and Education as Function

All human activity can, at least potentially, have an educational function. Any social interaction, be it in casual conversation or in strictly circumscribed social rituals, in playful or serious activity, in instrumental or expressive relations, can have the function of educating its participants. All of life potentially informs, and if we were to define adult education in terms of function then we would have to include all of social life as part of adult education. Obviously this is unrealistic, both in practical terms and also because it does not accurately represent the nature of adult education as we find it in experience. Technically, and realistically, adult education refers to a more delimited area of social life, namely to those activities whose primary purpose is to educate.

This fact has a number of implications which are ordinarily disregarded. If adult education activity is the object and education the purpose, what is the subject? Whose purposes are we referring to? By themselves, activities do not have a purpose, since purpose is lodged in human beings and not in social forms. To say that certain social activities have the purpose to educate is merely a shorthand and quite inaccurate way of saying that these activities have been organized by some person, or groups of persons, for the purpose of educating.

This clarification leads to two important conclusions: (1) adult education is educational activity which takes place in an organized context, and (2) whether activity is defined as adult education depends on the purposes of the organizers of that activity. Adult education is defined from the top, so to speak, and not from the bottom.

These conclusions enable us to understand why some activities, which are undertaken by adults for educational purposes, are ordinarily not counted as adult

education. For example, the upper middle class in the United States has a long tradition of traveling to Europe in order to broaden their education, a tradition represented in the novels of Henry James. Increasingly such travel is also engaged in by people in the lower strata of the middle class. Yet, even though the purpose of travel may be educational, such travel is not counted as adult education in the technical sense except when undertaken as part of a systematic program of study under the auspices of a formal organization.

The same point can be made even more clearly with regard to the reading of books. Reading is a relatively widespread activity, and although it may be undertaken for a great variety of reasons at least some leisure-time reading is done for the purpose of self-education. Yet, such reading is ordinarily not included under the rubric of "adult education." On the other hand, the same books read in a Great Books Discussion Group would be considered adult education activity. These different classifications of essentially similar activities seem to result from the reasons we have suggested above: private reading does not take place in an organized context, while reading for a Great Books group is an organized activity defined as educational by its organizers.

These two examples, of travel and reading, refer to activities which are not defined as part of adult education, even though they may be engaged in by adults for educational purposes. Examples of the obverse can also be easily found. That is, even though an activity may be officially considered to be part of adult education, its participants may not be engaged in the activity for educational reasons. This is true even in formal educational institutions, where many students reputedly enroll for social reasons, to be with friends, or to find husbands. Yet, the overriding consideration in defining such institutions as educational agencies is their purpose as defined by the organizers of the institution and by the larger society.

The distinctions we have made so far have been rather clearcut and precise. Actually, current developments suggest a growth of systematic self-education under no organizational auspices, which would fall somewhere between our categories of private self-education vs. participation in organized adult education. We refer here to the growing market in what might be called, for want of a better term, "packaged self-education." One can now buy "Lifetime Reading Plans," "Art Seminars in the Home," speed reading equipment to be used in self-instruction, different types of teaching machines, and a host of reference books for home use. To some extent this is nothing new, having been pioneered by the encyclopedias and such "packaged" educational items as the Harvard Classics. Nevertheless, we suspect that this type of systematic self-educational material is becoming available at an increasing rate, and may come to constitute a substantial part of the total adult education in this country. At present, however, such activities are usually not included under the rubric of "adult education."[5]

Education vs. Recreation or Entertainment

So far we have placed a strong emphasis on the purposes of the organizations which organize and sponsor adult education activity, and have said little about the content of such activities. Clearly, all sorts of social activities are carried on in organizational contexts. What is the distinction between educational activities and, let us say, recreational activities or pure entertainment?

---

[5]An exception is the current study of participation conducted by the National Opinion Research Center of the University of Chicago. On the basis of a national survey of the adult population they estimate 17,160,000 adult education participants, and an additional 8,960,000 engaged in self-education. See John W. C. Johnstone, Volunteers for Learning (Chicago: National Opinion Research Center, February 1963), p. 18.

Once again we must refer to the purposes of the sponsoring organizations and of their administrative personnel. Since all activities are potentially educational there would seem to be no restriction on the content of adult education activity. We would therefore include both vocational and non-vocational education; instruction in games as well as instruction in more serious matters; indeed, we would include instruction in anything. The basic character of education is to inform--the content of the information is, for our purposes here, irrelevant.[6]

This, it seems to us, is the actual situation in the United States, where the content of adult education is extremely varied and where the distinction between education and training is generally not persuasive. In Great Britain, where education refers generally to the more intellectual pursuits, adult education is more limited in its content. As we pointed out in the introduction, the British view of adult education is restricted to liberal education, while pursuits such as vocational training are placed under the rubric of "further education." In the United States, these two types of education are generally combined under the same heading.

Even though instruction in bridge or in folk dancing would therefore be included as an adult education activity in the United States, actually practicing these pursuits without instruction would not. That is, organized clubs of bridge-players or folk dancers would come under the heading of recreational activities, not of educational activities, unless the primary purpose of these clubs were instruction. Although in actual practice this distinction is often

---

[6]There are, of course, restrictions on the types of things which are taught in adult education activities. Such restrictions arise, however, from the fact that adults are being taught ("childish" activities are therefore not usually included in adult education curricula), or because of restrictions due to the norms of the community (e.g., birth control cannot be taught in some communities), or because of the interests of the participants (metaphysics may not be included if no one in the community is interested in this subject). These are not restrictions which are traceable to the educational process as such.

difficult to make, since those who practice an art usually receive instruction in it also, it seems to be a necessary distinction lest we once again broaden the field of adult education to all sorts of activities whose primary purpose is not education. (Some may feel that we have already broadened the field too much by including instruction in non-serious pursuits.) Similarly, activities whose primary purpose is entertainment would not be included under adult education, regardless of how educational such activities may be in their effects on their audience.[7]

Recreation and entertainment are examples of activities which are not included under the term "adult education" because their purpose is primarily not educational. There are activities, however, whose primary purpose is to educate, even though they are not usually referred to as adult education. One example of such activity is psychotherapy. It would take us too far afield to discuss this interesting exception in detail, except to suggest that while the basic character of education is to inform, the primary purpose of psychotherapy is to reform. Thus, the subject matter of psychotherapeutic sessions is the participant himself rather than a body of knowledge, the methods used are ordinarily not used in educational institutions, the matters talked about are normally private and personal, and psychiatrists as relatively autonomous specialists are professionally devoted to protecting this autonomy. Nevertheless, from the societal point of view the function of psychotherapy is similar to at least one of the functions of adult education, namely, to enable the participant to engage productively in his private and public pursuits.

---

[7]See the distinction between adult education and the education of adults in C. Hartley Grattan, In Quest of Knowledge (New York: Association Press, 1955), Ch. I, pp. 3-17.

The Character of Adulthood

In the concept of adult education are lodged ideas and perspectives both about education and about adulthood. Some of the former we have discussed above; the notions about adulthood which seem implicit in the views about adult education must also be examined and clarified.

It is clear that the concept of the adult, as it is used in adult education, does not refer to chronological age, even though legal and other definitions of adulthood have such reference. The right to enter into contract, which is one of the legal rights reserved to adults, begins at the maximum age of twenty-one for men and eighteen for women; in some Southern States, males at age sixteen and females at age fourteen are already considered legal adults. Such legal defini tions, however, do not cause organizations which educate people over twenty-one to be considered adult education institutions. Graduate schools, at which the majority of students may be adult legally, are still not generally held to be adult education. The conception of adulthood used in adult education is therefore not chronological, but is rather a social conception.

To make this point more emphatically, we may compare the legal view of adulthood with the psychiatric view. In the latter, chronological age is almost completely irrelevant. Rather, the major determinant of adulthood appears to be the ability to exercise harmonious control over one's actions. Thus, regression is a return to childish modes of action, and may occur regardless of the age of the patient. Pathological defense mechanisms, in turn, imply a lack of harmonious control in which the person is "driven" to act without being responsible for the acts he undertakes. This type of action may also occur regardless of the age of the actor. Indeed, in such cases, the psychiatric and legal perspectives meet on common ground, since the patient may be committed to a mental institution without his consent, under the assumption that his consent is not required because

he cannot be assumed to have control over his own actions. In this sense, then, he is not considered an adult (in unenlightened areas, he may indeed not even be considered human).

If age is not the major criterion used to establish adulthood, then what criteria <u>are</u> used in adult education? As we see it, these criteria are two-fold: (1) from the individual's point of view, adulthood means independence; (2) from the societal point of view, adulthood means the acceptance of social responsibility.

These are rather cryptic statements, and require amplification. Independence usually takes the forms of marriage and financial self-support. The adolescent moves out of his family of orientation and, by marriage, creates his own family for whose welfare he is now responsible. His primary loyalty shifts from the family which was responsible for him to his new family, and the coming of "his own" children symbolize his adulthood both psychologically and socially. At the same time, he acquires financial independence by entering the labor force on a full-time basis.

The societal point of view merely represents the other side of the same coin, and is symbolized by the individual's ability to assume what are generally considered adult roles. These are the family roles--husband and wife, father and mother--and the work role of being a full-time participant in the labor force. In this sense retired workers would also be considered adults, since they have already fulfilled their societal obligations.

This view of adulthood explains the prevalent conception of adult education as part-time education. There is nothing in the process of education itself, or of the programs offered, which requires adult education to be part-time. This requirement, rather, stems from implicit views about adulthood, namely, that an

adult is a person engaged in full-time work, and that as a result of this fact his education is necessarily part-time.

Actually, there are instances in which adult education is full-time rather than part-time. Because of economic dislocations, many occupations are becoming obsolescent and there is an increasing need for wholesale retraining of personnel. Retraining programs, such as those authorized by the Manpower and Training Act of 1962, tend to be full-time rather than part-time, because the participants do not have the requisite skills to obtain jobs. Although such retraining may become an increasingly important part of adult education, at the moment it represents only a minute proportion of the adult education programs offered to the public.

What about the role of formal education in connection with the attainment of adulthood? Implicit in the idea of adult education is the view that full-time students, or young students working toward a degree even if they do not attend full-time, are not as yet adults. In a sense, this is a realistic view, because in a variety of ways society does not treat students as adults. College students receive preferential treatment from law enforcement agencies (if "adults" engaged in panty raids they would be treated more severely than students have been treated in such circumstances) and are "protected" at many colleges and universities. by special provisions for housing, special rules about moral and ethical behavior, and leniency regarding participation in pranks and other "childish" activity. Students of legal age are therefore still viewed as preparing for adulthood, rather than having quite attained it.

It is in this context that we can understand why graduate training in universities is not considered adult education. Similarly, we can understand why the U. S. Office of Education, in its nationwide surveys of college and university adult education enrollment, defines adult education as instruction

"designed for, or attended principally by, persons who have terminated their formal education.[8]

The Connection between Formal Education and Adult Education

We have suggested three criteria for adulthood which are implied in views about adult education: marriage, financial self-support, and termination of formal education.[9] In the literature on adult education the last-named criterion is the most frequently mentioned when attempts are made to distinguish adult education from other educational activities. Yet, this distinction between formal education and adult education is ambiguous today, and is likely to become even more ambiguous in the near future, because of four developments taking place in American society.

First, while some characteristics of adulthood are moving down in the age scale, others are moving up, so that discrepancies between the different criteria we have suggested are increasing. On the one hand, an increasing proportion of college students, both graduate and undergraduate, are married, have children, and are at least in part self-supporting (often because the wife works full-time in order to support her husband's education). On the other hand, an increasing proportion of students are staying in formal education longer and going for higher degrees, so that the termination of formal education is coming to take place in the middle and late twenties. These trends indicate that college students are generally taking on more adult characteristics, and that therefore the distinction between adult education and formal education may become increasingly difficult to maintain.

---

[8]See Handbook of Data and Definitions in Higher Education (American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, 1962).

[9]For a discussion of these factors placed in their historical context see Robert J. Havighurst, "How We Postpone Youth's Coming of Age," in R.M. MacIver (ed.) Dilemmas of Youth: In America Today (New York: Harper & Bros., 1961), pp. 5-14.

A second development which makes the distinction ambiguous is the use of formal educational institutions as in-service training organizations for the professions. This is already a well-established procedure in the teaching profession, in which salary increases are sometimes tied to the teachers' enrollment in evening or summer courses at formal educational institutions. It may be an increasing trend in such professions as law, medicine, engineering, and business administration, in which knowledge and skills change rapidly so that practitioners may "fall behind" without continuous formal training. In some instances, industry may organize its own in-service training programs and conduct its own classes, but utilize formal educational institutions as supplementary sources of training. Clearly, if these programs were conducted by private agencies they would fall under the rubric of adult education. Since they may become part of the regular curricula of the universities, it is less evident whether they should be regarded as part of formal education or adult education. The professions are one of the most rapidly increasingly occupational categories in the labor force, and we have only begun to feel the educational impact of their growth.[10]

A third development is the provision of what would ordinarily be adult education by the junior colleges.[11] Enrollments in junior colleges are increasing more than in any of the other formal educational institutions, and much of this increase is in courses which give terminal training. We are referring here to such training as cosmetology, automobilie mechanics, lower level electronics,

---

[10]This impact is already beginning to be felt in the Extension Division of the statewide University of California, where increasing emphasis is given to postgraduate courses in the professions because of the increasing demand for such courses. See "Clientele Changes Extension," Daily Californian, March 11, 1963, p.3

[11]Burton R. Clark, The Open Door College (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960).

TV repair, and other kinds of skill training. Ordinarily such training would be considered part of adult education or part of the vocational high school program, but increasingly training in the manual skilled trades is becoming part of the regular curriculum of formal educational institutitions such as the junior college.

Not only have some of the subjects formerly provided by adult education drifted into the junior college, but some of their clientele have done so also. Many of the students officially enrolled in junior colleges are actually adults, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between adult and non-adult enrollments in many junior colleges. To some extent, therefore, the junior college is becoming an in-service training institute for the skilled trades, just as universities may become the in-service training institutes of the professions. There has been some dissatisfaction with the junior colleges' attempts to fit all curricula into a "day school" mold to service adolescents and adults alike. In Berkeley, California, this dissatisfaction has found expression in a recent effort to establish a technical junior college that would be used primarily to meet the needs of adults for manual technical skills. However, if present trends continue, the distinction between adult education and formal education, particularly in the junior colleges, will remain highly ambiguous.

A fourth development is the creation by colleges and universities of special curricula for adults. For example, the Radcliffe Institute for Individual Study pays selected adult women a stipend for their household help so that they can devote full-time to study. The University of Minnesota has designed a special program for adult women desiring to return to school where they can pursue study in the regular curriculum, extension division, by correspondence, or to undertake independent study. Brooklyn College has experimented with a special adult degree program in which mature adults can work toward degrees through the regular college

program and in special seminars at a pace consistent with their responsibilities, and in which certain work experience and past achievements are evaluated for granting of college degree credit.[12]

This trend of making full-time study part of the regular college curriculum will, we think, gather momentum, because of certain developments in other spheres of American society, especially among women. The number of college educated women is rapidly increasing in this country, but many of these women enter marriage instead of the labor force when they graduate from college. There is also a trend, however, to marry younger and to space children more closely, so that many women are free to use their college education in the labor force by the time they reach the early forties and have grown children who do not require attention in the home. The Radcliffe program was especially designed for such women, to give them "refresher" courses so that they would be rapidly brought up-to-date and could then profitably put their prior college education to better use. The trends in age of marriage and spacing of children suggest that this pool of available womanpower will increase, and the formal educational institutions will probably take cognizance of this fact by providing for education for adults in their curricula. We are seeing only the beginning of this trend.[13]

The Place of Adult Education in American Society

It has not been our aim in this paper to suggest new definitions of adult education, since there are already a sufficient number of diverse definitions to be found in the literature. Rather, we have attempted to clarify some of the assumptions which underlie the views of adult education generally held, and to

---

[12] Bernard H. Stern, Never Too Late for College: The Brooklyn Degree Program for Adults (Chicago: Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults, 1963).

[13] "The American Female: A Special Supplement," Harper's Magazine, October 1962.

do justice to the actual activities which we find in the field. From the discussion so far, however, we can derive some ideas about the place of adult education in American society and the kind of societal functions it performs.

First there is the implicit assumption, which is perhaps also an actuality, that, in the educational realm, adult education is a marginal activity. This assumption takes the view that education is properly to be carried on by the formal educational institutions, from elementary through higher education. These institutions have traditionally had the function of preparing children for "life," that is, for participation as adults in the affairs of the community and the nation. If the schools performed their job well, so the assumption goes, then their graduates would be properly prepared and would not require any further education. The formal educational institutions are thus regarded as the "legitimate" institutions in whom society has invested the function of preparation and education. Adult education, on the other hand, has gradually and somewhat chaotically formed, without overall planning and in a decentralized fashion, to meet educational contingencies as they arose.[14]

We feel that this view has considerable merit. The great strength of adult education is its flexibility and decentralization. It can shift in organization and content to meet the demands of the moment, and can be conducted by an constituted organization. Indeed, as we know, much of the organized adult activity which we include under adult education is carried on by non-educational organizations.

---

[14]Adult education as a marginal activity is also discussed, from a somewhat different perspective, in Burton R. Clark, The Marginality of Adult Education. Notes and Essays on Education for Adults, No. 20 (Chicago: Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults, 1958).

In contrast, formal educational institutions have heavy investments in capital goods and considerable pressures to teach specified subjects, and are therefore not as flexible. Usually they will not undertake the teaching of new subjects or new skills until it is clear that a majority, or a substantial minority, will find these new materials useful, not only at the moment but also in the foreseeable future. In this sense, adult education is a testing ground for the formal educational institutions--courses in new subjects are organized, perhaps independently in various parts of the country, and when they prove to be of sufficient general interest and usefulness to large numbers of people they are coopted by the formal educational institutions. We have given a number of examples of such occurrences in this paper: the movement of "apprenticeship" training into the junior colleges, and the movement of in-service training among the professions into the colleges and universities.

These movements can also be inferred from the available educational statistics. The statistics show that, even though adult education has grown rapidly in the last forty years, certain segments of the formal educational institutions have grown even faster.[15] These segments are what might be called terminals of the two major educational institutions at which education is terminated, the high school (for which the junior college is becoming the terminal) and the higher degree programs at the universities. As Table I indicates, in the period 1924-1955 adult education enrollments have tripled, enrollments in graduate schools have increased about nine-fold, and junior

---

[15] We are reacting here to statements in the literature such as the following: "Adult education is the largest and the fastest growing segment of American education." See Robert J. Blakely, "What Is Adult Education?" in Malcolm S. Knowles (ed.), Handbook of Adult Education in the United States (Chicago; Adult Education Association of the U.S.A., 1960), p. 5.

college enrollments have increased by a factor of fiteen. This is true even though we have used what we feel to be inflated estimates of adult education enrollments.[16]

Table 1

Enrollments in Adult Education, University/College Graduate Schools, and Junior Colleges, 1924-1955

Year	Number Enrolled (in thousands)			Factor of Increase in Enrollment		
	Adult Education*	Graduate Schools**	Junior College***	Adult Education	Graduate Schools	Junior College
1924	14,881	28	21	1.00	1.00	1.00
1934	22,311	71	78	1.50	2.54	3.71
1950	29,250	237	243	1.96	8.46	11.57
1955	49,508	250	326	3.33	8.93	15.52

*Estimates provided by Malcolm S. Knowles, The Adult Education Movement in the United States (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), p. 251.

**Figures for 1934-1955 obtained from U. S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957 (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1960), p. 210. The figure for 1924 was estimated by interpolation from the figures on 1920 and 1930 enrollments in the U. S. Office of Education, Biennial Survey of Education in the United States, 1954-1956 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1958), Chapter 4, Section I, p.8

***Obtained from U. S. Bureau of the Census, op. cit.

So far we have treated adult education as a marginal activity, and suggested that there are many activities which are now conducted through adult education, but which may be moving into the formal educational institutions. It is also true, however, that many activities now in adult education will remain under its province. These activities can be fairly rigorously classified under the

---

[16]These estimates are the best presently available. We are, however, preparing more reliable statistics with the use of Gallup polls, which inquired about adult education participation in 1938, 1944, 1950, 1957, and 1963; with the U.S. Census statistics of 1957; and with the survey of participation now in process at the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. These materials should provide more reliable trend data than any recently published sources.

various functions which adult education fulfills in the larger society at present, and which are most likely to continue in the future.

First, as we have suggested, adult education has been concerned with education made necessary by special occasions of societal dislocation. Several decades ago this function took the form of providing citizenship training for large masses of immigrants; today it is more likely to take the form of providing retraining for people who have lost jobs because of occupational obsolescence.[17] Such special educational contingencies will probably continue to arise in the future, since the economy is changing so rapidly that the skills taught in the formal educational institutions may, to some extent, be outdated at the very moment of graduation. Population movements from rural to urban areas, and from one part of the country to another, also militate against the usefulness of information received during the regular school years.

A second task handled by adult education, but probably declining in importance, is the remedial function. Instruction in literacy or help in securing a high school diploma were, at one time, of major importance in this area, but with the increasing tendency of students to remain in school longer, this function may not be as necessary as it once was.

A third function is the provision of education in connection with actual experience. In the world of work, this type of activity takes the form of on-the-job-training. The regular schools may teach vocational subjects well, but tend to do so in general terms. On the other hand, most jobs have special characteristics in addition to requiring a general ability, and therefore problems may arise in fitting a person with general training to the specific job which he is hired to undertake. This may require, therefore, additional education. Also,

---

[17] See The Governor's Committee on Unemployment (appointed by Otto Kerner, Governor, State of Illinois), Report, January 1963, pp. 66-112.

the formal educational institutions often teach subjects without pointing out their vocational relevance, although institutions such as Antioch College and Northeastern University provide both academic and work experience so that the connection between the two is more readily apparent. When this connection is not apparent, additional education is often required.

A fourth function is the duplication of instruction provided by the formal educational institutions. Much of the curriculum in high schools and colleges is elective, and therefore may be disregarded by students while they attend school. Either their schedule is so heavy that they may not have time to study subjects in which they are interested but which are outside their major area of specialization, or they may not be interested in subjects outside their specialized area. However, their interests may change, and adult education provides the opportunity to gain systematic instruction in such "academic" subjects after they have terminated their formal education.[18]

A fifth area in which adult education functions is the provision of purely vocational training. Although formal educational institutions teach vocational subjects, they often lag behind the needs of the economy which may change rapidly, especially in certain areas. For example, instruction in the new automatic devices used in automation may have to be provided by adult education, which is more flexible than the formal educational institutions. Just as typing is becoming well established in the high school curricula of urban areas, machines are being developed which will make typing skills obsolescent, that is, by automatic conversion of dictation into typewritten form. Not only do the formal educational institutions often lag behind, they also do not and cannot be

---

[18]Hans Simons, Higher Adult Education: Its Place and Its Functions. Notes and Essays on Education for Adults, No. 26 (Chicago: Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults, 1959).

expected to give instruction in relatively obscure vocational skills. Such provision is the province of specialized schools or of special adult education programs.[19]

A sixth area, in which adult education has a truly specialized competence, is the provision of cultural materials and the support of the values of education, learning, thinking, and reflection. Shakespeare read at the age of seventeen is a different Shakespeare when read at age forty or fifty. Adults bring to their studies different experiences and perspectives than the young. Adult education has a special opportunity and responsibility to bring participants to an awareness of this fact and thus to foster a commitment to life-long learning for the greater realization of the individual as a human being and as a significant member of society.

Finally, adult education provides instruction for special interests. This, again, is a function which we cannot expect public educational institutions to fulfill, since they are required to deal with the great cross-section of the nation. In this area are to be found religious instruction, and courses in hobbies and crafts and special skills such as the playing of musical instruments. In this area the flexibility of adult education is again a great advantage, since almost any special information asked for by small groups of people can be provided, with minimum difficulties in scheduling and other administrative matters which are so much a part of the instruction provided by formal educational institutions. Any special interests expressed by rather small groups of adults can be satisfied, usually without too much difficulty.

---

[19]Luther H. Evans and George E. Arnstein (eds.), Automation and the Challenge to Education (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1962).

In summary, the picture we have sketched is complex. Adult education is partly a duplication of instruction offered by the formal educational institutions, partly a remedial effort, partly a testing ground for formal education, partly an emergency operation to handle special educational contingencies, partly a structure providing education in matters of primary interest to adults, and partly a means by which special interests may receive instructional aid. Diversity is, indeed, the major characteristic of adult education, and is also the source of its great strength and special competence. As adult education becomes administratively more organized, we should be on guard against premature closure; as new trends in society develop, they should be reflected in new kinds of programs offered by adult education. In this paper we have tried to suggest what adult education is at present, and some of the trends which may change its character, at least partly, in the foreseeable future.

Research and Practical Implications

The point of view we have presented in this paper has implications both for research and for administrators and practitioners in the field of adult education.

Since adult education activity is organized activity, and is given organization and direction from the top, it would be exceedingly useful to discover the forces or interests which motivate the people at the bottom, the people who participate, and the views they have about adult education activity. We have hardly mentioned the participants in this paper, primarily because little is known about them except rather obvious characteristics such as age, sex, and socio-economic status. We do know that the better educated are more likely to participate in adult education, and that the audience for adult education is

largely middle class.[20] Is this to be taken as a fact of life about which nothing can be done, or is there something about the organization of activities which prevents more participation from blue collar groups? Research is obviously needed in this area.

It would also be useful to investigate the relation between participation and the general life style of the participants. Where does adult education fit into their lives and how is it related to their other activities? We are fairly knowledgeable about the functions which adult education performs for society, but much less knwoledgeable about the functions it performs for participants.

With regard to administrative implications, we decry the unfortunate tendency to let practice define the field. In this paper we have stressed the dynamic nature of adult education, its flux and its constant response to new tendencies in the larger society. There is great need for a continuing sensitivity to new developments, which should be noted early and whose implications for adult education should serve as guidelines for the creation of new educational programs. Presently there is a need for the retraining of those who are in obsolescent jobs. Just over the horizon there is beginning to appear the sight of an educated society, one in which the majority are high school graduates and a large minority with at least some college training. This impressive trend toward more formal education will probably result in an increased demand for instruction in liberal subjects, a demand whose beginnings we are even now witnessing.

The prickly issue of "give them what they want" versus "give them what they need" will continue to remain with us in the foreseeable future. While the principle of giving adults what they want will always be an important first

---

[20] Edmund deS. Bruner, Davis S. Wilder, Corinne Kirchner, and John S. Newberry, Jr., An Overview of Adult Education Research (Chicago: Adult Education Association of the U.S.A., 1959), pp. 102-112, 116-118.

principle of programming in adult education, practitioners also have an obligation to exercise leadership by trying to extend the horizons of participants, helping them to become more aware of what they need, and interesting them in important problems. This is an area in which there should be a creative interplay between practitioner and participant. While the initial motive for attending an adult education program may be to fill an immediate need such as the attainment of some vocational skill, the adult teachers and administrators have a responsibility to broaden the initial narrow concern of participants into a deeper commitment to liberalizing educational experiences. One has a responsibility to the participant to give him what he wants, but one also has a responsibility to society to help him get what he needs.

In the future, this tension may increasingly take the form of merging vocational and liberal education. As Whitehead said, "The antithesis between a technical and a liberal education is fallacious. There can be no adequate technical education which is not liberal, and no liberal education which is not technical.[21] Increasingly a premium must be placed not so much on what to think, but on how to think. Preparation for living in a rapidly changing world requires that people must learn how to learn, and increasingly adult educators will have to concern themselves with the design of educational programs that explore and develop the potential for intellectual, social, emotional, and aesthetic growth, and that contribute to the improvement of the individual as a human being, as a member of his society, and as a citizen of the world.

ERIC Clearinghouse
FEB 1 1 1968
on Adult Education

---

[21] Alfred North Whitehead, The Aims of Education & Other Essays (New York: Macmillan, 1929), p. 74.